



(U) Write Right: Spell-check: The Double-Edged Sword

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(U) This is the first of a new monthly column, "Write Right." It will provide tips for writing better reports.

(U) If you want to provide hours of entertainment for your colleagues, just run spell-check on your composition (be it a product report, memo, agency-all announcement -- anything with a broad audience) and then send it out without a final proofreading. NSANet's bandwidth use will spike as your writing is clipped and forwarded around the world with comments like "I should think they would be 'Sorry for the incontinence'!" (That one's a classic, and still occurs from time to time.) Product reports that describe provincial governments building a bride, ministers making sure their constituents get the massage, alerts to failed assignation attempts, vacancy announcements that call for personnel with duel skill sets...who doesn't have folders full of these goofs?

(U) But seriously, folks, unintended humor isn't the only consequence of overreliance on your spell-checker. We have in our files an executive weekly highlights in which all the POC lines contain common nouns, because someone kept hitting the spell-checker's "Correct" button without looking. We also have product reports that give the opposite impression of what was intended, because "now" was substituted for "not," and "viz." for "vice." As Mark Twain said, the difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and lightning bug.

(U) Granted, once you've rewritten a piece several times, it's harder and harder to proofread it, and when your eye catches no misspelled words (because you've used that handy tool), it's easy to relax and hit *Send*. Make a deal with your co-workers; you'll cast a final eye over their writing if they'll do the same for you. Avoid inclusion in the NSA bloopers e-mail alias!



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